

Originality: *Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen.*
—John Steinbeck, American novelist, 1902-68

Opinion

'Wheel Deals' roll to near-miss court spiel

Sometimes you volunteer for stuff only to regret it later. An early commitment becomes a late obligation. I will admit to having that feeling when I jumped at the "Wheelchair Basketball" idea. Each year POD (or maybe it's HED) sponsors a team to participate in this worthy cause. It is designed to bring attention to the challenges disabled folks face every day, even if we are forced to face it for only two 12-minute halves of a basketball game.

My self-nomination to the team this year was readily accepted, even without a tryout. But several weeks went by before I got the E-mail message that we were actually going to have a practice at a nearby gym. Oh, yeah, that one. I mean I did sign up for it, so might as well meet my obligation even though, frankly, I didn't want to be bothered. But Roland Stine in IM had crafted some pretty neat "jerseys" that looked a little like T-shirts with a sharp-looking logo on them and my own personal number on the back. No play, no shirt, no service. OK, I'll go.

So the "team" — formerly known as Prince but now known as the Wheel Deals — met at Pearl Harbor and went through some makeshift drills trying to get used to shooting baskets from an unstable wheelchair. In fact, before we located the chairs, Ed Yoshimura—an experienced veteran who had either played this game before or read a Sports Illustrated article about it, I wasn't sure which—told those neophytes among us to shoot from our knees. That was supposed to simulate what was in store for us with the chairs. Instead it simulated aging cartilage being splayed over hardwood floors and hurt like hell. Nobody made any baskets from that position. I think it was Ed's ploy to make us happy to be able to fall on our backs out of wheelchairs for a change.

By the end of an hour's practice I was learning at least one challenge disabled people face — aches and pains all over the upper part of my body from using my hands and arms to roll about with no help from my legs. But the real tournament was three days away, so plenty of time to recuperate.

Saturday morning I drove to Barber's Point and got there in plenty of time for our 9:15 a.m. "tip-off" against a team from some dental detachment. Maj. Dave Austin was elected by proclamation to be team captain and he wisely split us up into two squads, with Lolly Silva and Maj. Linda Fischer on either team as our "gottahaveone" female participants. Before that sounds too chauvinistic I should point out that these two were among our BEST PLAYERS. Maydean

Martin and Anita Naone were our inspirational sidelines and that left Dave, Ed, Lolly, Eric Bjorken and me on First Squad and Dave Lindsey, Ed Yago, Glenn Oshiro, Mike Pangalanan, and Linda on the Second Squad.

What transpired in the next half-hour or so was great fun. Wheeling, slipping, sliding, tossing the ball, falling on our backs and crashing into each other . . . it was like the Keystone Cops on wheels, but somehow we looked up at the scoreboard and found ourselves ahead, 4-0. It wouldn't last though. Dental started tossing the ball up and a few started to fall. Six minutes were gone just like that and



The View from Here
by Larry Hawthorne



The Wheel Deals—Front row (L-R) Maydean Martin, ED-DA; Glenn Oshiro, ED-DA; Mike Pangilinan, ET-E; Maj. Linda Fischer, SM; Eric Bjorken, ED-DG. Back row (L-R) David Lindsey, PP-P; Ed Yago, CO-FQ; Ed Yoshimura, CO-H; Maj. Dave Austin, DD; Larry Hawthorne, PA; Lolly Silva, CO-OR. Photo by Tish Austin

Second Squad took over. Tough defense, low scoring, by the end of the first 12-minute half, we were all knotted up at four points apiece. Half two began and we quickly scored first making it 6-4. Dental tied us again, and as the game clock wound down (they don't even stop for injuries) we were beginning to think of overtime. Out of nowhere, Dental sneaks in a ringer who throws up a prayer from halfcourt and banks it in. Just like that we're down 9-6. Dave Austin launched an attempted three-pointer at the buzzer that rattled off the rim. It was just that close. It was just that much fun.

You can pencil me in now for next year because I know we had class. We could have been contenders. We could have been champs. Next time?